

Work, Death, and Disease



Lev Tolstoy

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(Legend)

There is a legend among the Indians of South America: God created people, they say, at first, so that they did not need to work, didn't need housing, clothes, food, and all lived up to one hundred years and did not know any illnesses. Some time has passed, and when God looked at how people lived, he saw that instead of rejoicing in their lives, they, caring about themselves, each quarreled with each other and built for themselves such life that they didn't only not rejoice in it, but cursed it. So God said to himself: that's because they live apart, each for oneself. And to ensure that this doesn't happen, God made it impossible for people to live without work, - to not to suffer from cold and hunger, they needed now to build themselves houses, dig the ground, grow and collect fruits and grains. "Labor will unite them," thought God: - "it's impossible alone to chop and bring logs and build dwellings, impossible alone to make tools and sow and gather, and spin, and weave and sew clothes. They will need to understand that the tighter they will work together, the more they'll accomplish and the better they'll live. And this will unite them."

It took some more time, and God came again to see how people lived. But people lived worse than before. They worked together – couldn't have been otherwise, but not all together, but all divided into small bunches, and each bunch tried to take away work from another, and all of them interfered with each other, wasted time and efforts for fighting, and it was bad for all. When he saw that, and that was not good, God decided to make people not to know the hour of their death and able to die at any moment. And he announced this to them. "Knowing that each of them may die at any moment, - thought God, "they won't, because of the worries for their life that may cease at every moment, be angry at each other and spoil those hours of life to which they were allotted for them". But it didn't work out. When God returned to see how people lived now, he saw that the life of the people has not improved. People who were stronger than others, taking an advantage of the fact that people may die at any time, subjugated the weaker ones to themselves, by

killing some and threatening the rest with death. And this led them to the life in which the strongest, and their successors, did not work and were wearied from boredom. But the weak ones worked by force and suffered for not having rest. Both were afraid and hated each other. And people's lives became even more miserable. Having seen this, God, to mend the matters, decided to use the last resort: he sent all kinds of diseases to people. God thought that if all people see they are prone to illnesses, they will realize that the healthy need to pity the sick and help them so that when they are ill, the healthy would help them. And again, God left humans. But when he returned to see how they lived now, he saw that since they became prone to diseases, human life became even worse. The same illnesses, which, according to God, were to connect people, further separated them. People, who forced others to work for them, forced them to look after them during their sicknesses and they themselves didn't look after the sick. And those who were forced to work and to look after the sick, were so exhausted by the work that they couldn't take care of their own sick people, and they left them without assistance. To make sure that caring for the sick didn't interfere with the pleasures of the rich, they arranged for the patients such homes where patients suffered and died without involvement of people who cared about them, but in the hands of hired people, looking after the sick not only without pity, but with disgust. In addition, most of the illnesses people recognized contagious and, fearing to catch them, the not only didn't come close to the patients but separated even from those who came into contact with the sick.

Then God said to himself: If this approach couldn't bring people to understanding of what makes their happiness, then let them themselves come to it through their sufferings. And God has left people alone. And being left alone, for long time people lived without realizing that they can and should be happy. And only very recently some of them came to understand that the work should not be a scarecrow for some and forced torture for the others, but must be a shared joyful business that connects all people; they began to realize that under the threat of death, which may come in any hour, the only reasonable solution for every person is to joyfully, in harmony and love, spend designated to each person years, months, hours, or minutes; they began to realize that the disease not only should not be the reason for separation, but, rather, must be the cause for loving communication with each other.

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